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THE
AUTHORITY OF GOVERNMENT,
AND
DUTY OF OBEDIENCE.

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S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT THE
CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF DURHAM,

FEBRUARY 3, 1793.

BY CHARLES WESTON, M. A.
PREBENDARY OF DURHAM.

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THEORY OF SOFTENING

OF CEMENTS

S. E. M. O. N.

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF DURHAM

1870

CHARLES WESTON, ESQ.
PRESIDENT

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S E R M O N.

I. Peter, ii. 6.—*As free and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as servants of God.*

FROM this and many other passages in the New Testament, it appears that in the earliest times of the Gospel the doctrine of Christian Liberty was either greatly misunderstood, or perversely extended to very unwarrantable lengths. The probable causes of This are to be met with in the particular circumstances of the New Christians, as well as in the natural bias of mankind ; and for the remedy of their consequential evils, and the prevention of them for the future, we may infer the necessity of that clearness and strictness, with which

we actually find the Rights and Powers of Authority, and the duties of Subordination and Submission required by the laws and doctrines of Christianity.

The Equality, which upon the principles of the Gospel subsisted among all ranks and orders of men, with respect to their great Creator, their Saviour and Judge, as Men, and as Servants of the same common Lord and Master, Heirs of the same promises and expectations; which appeared daily in their mutual intercourse, and in the service of religion, in the extraordinary powers of the Holy Spirit, diffused without regard to worldly rank among all the members of the Church; together with the national prejudices of the Jews; may very fairly be presumed to have cooperated to this point, and to have led many to conceive that their Union and Fellowship in the Gospel of Christ, their equal participation of such glorious privileges, and of the miraculous Powers of the Holy Ghost, set them above the obligation, not only of the several relations of private Life, but the duties also of public Subordination and Obedience.

ence. To the latter error, the Converts of the Jewish Nation in particular were liable from the peculiar nature of their situation. The general aversion and contempt, in which the Heathen Nations were holden by the Jews, is well known ; the reluctance and indignation, with which they bore their yoke, and the zeal of their attachment to the Law of Moses, which they esteemed superior to every other obligation. It is therefore by no means unnatural to suppose, that many among the Jewish Converts might easily imagine, that the Liberty of the Gospel, which freed them from the yoke of the Law, freed them also from every Subjection, but to the Kingdom of Christ ; that little or no regard was due to the authority of human Institutions, and the laws of people, whom they abhorred and despised. And we find in fact from their own Historian that about this time it was asserted among some of the Jews, that no obedience was due to the Romans, and to None but to God ; that they were free, and that even death was threatened to such as talked of submission to the Roman Power ; and further that these Zealots for Liberty, as being Ser-

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vants only of God, filled their miserable country with every evil, which the excess of the most dissolute Impurity, Rapine and Violence could produce.

The notion of Independence is too flattering to the haughty Spirit of Man ; too indulgent to his appetites and passions, not to be readily adopted and eagerly entertained. There is an uneasiness in restraint which men are glad to get rid of at any rate ; and, however useful and necessary it may be, there is something galling, in the very idea of Subjection. They will therefore naturally catch at every pretence of Exemption from the controul of Superior Power, and at every shadow of freedom from the restraints of Morality and Law ; and more especially will be apt to embrace them readily, when they suppose them to be founded on the sacred authorities of Conscience and Religion. Of the proneness of Mankind to this Delusion, we have too many proofs in history, too many instances of its fatal effects. On this basis the usurpations of the Papacy have raised their Vicarial Power of Christ on Earth, and have exalted

ted the Dominion of the See of Rome above all Principalities and Power. With these arms ambition, lust, and avarice, at different Periods and in different Countries, have broken through every restraint, and trampled under their feet all Authority and Law; and under the sanction of pretended principles of the Gospel, have defiled the Earth with Pollutions, or ravaged it with Outrage and Desolation.

Such have been the deplorable Consequences, which from time to time have resulted, since the rise of Christianity, from mistaken Notions, misguided Zeal, or willful and corrupt misunderstandings of the liberty and power of the Gospel; and have rendered our most holy Religion subservient to the worst purposes of the passions of Men. But Wisdom is clear, and to be justified in all her ways. How equal soever, and upon a level, all Mankind may be with regard to God; *Who is no respecter of Persons, in whose sight all the Kingdoms of the Earth are but as Drops, and the Nations as a Drop of a Bucket; before whom they are as Nothing, and are counted less than Nothing,*
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and Vanity ; yet the Subordinations of the several ranks of men, and the Powers of Government are established under the immediate Care and Providence of the Almighty : and, whatever Encouragement Men may have pretended to draw from the particular Circumstances and Doctrines of Christianity, to the reducing of Mankind to one common Level, to the extinction of Property, the abolition of the restraints of Law, and authority of Magistracy ; it is entirely disclaimed by Christianity itself, is in its consequences too subversive of all Morality and Virtue, not to be utterly repugnant to the great end, and that general teaching of the Gospel, which requires, *that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, Men should live soberly, righteously and godly in the present world, looking for the blessed Hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ ; who gave himself for us, that He might redeem us from all Iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good Works.* But, besides this general design and intention of the Gospel ; with which That also of civil Government corresponds, and which the subversion of it would in great measure defeat ;

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not only the moral duties of private Life, but those also of Society, the just Rights of the several ranks of Men, the preeminence and subordination of their Degrees, the rights and duties of public Government and Obedience, are therein supported and enforced on principles peculiarly Christian; from the Example, Humiliation, and Sufferings of the great Author and Finisher of our Faith, and as part of the Christian Service and Obedience due to God, as well as from the more general and positive injunctions of Himself and of his Apostles. His life affords us various instances of his own Obedience and Deference to Authority. Though conscious to himself of the fullness of his power and greatness, He is all Subjection; He interferes not with the jurisdiction of the Laws; but to a petition determinable by Them, replies with indignation, *Man, who made me a Judge or Divider over you?* He pays the tribute-money demanded; and on another occasion commands *To render unto Caesar the things due unto Caesar*; and again, says to the multitude and his disciples, *The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat; all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe*

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and do ; exacting the respect and reverence due to their station, however he condemns their practice. When he knew the multitudes would have made him King, he secretes himself from them, and retires into the mountains Alone ; and at length, with legions of Angels at his command, and Lord of all dominion and power, in obedience to the decision of Government, submits patiently to the Death and Sufferings of the Cross,

Such is the Pattern of Submission presented in the example of our Lord and Saviour ; such His Life ; such the Injunctions which he layed upon his Followers : and agreeable to this, is the whole tenour of the precepts given by his Apostles, urging from the example of their Master, for the honour of God and His doctrine of the Gospel, the Duties of Subordination ; supporting the Rights of Government, and enforcing Respect and Obedience to Magistracy and Law. *Put them in mind, says St Paul to Titus, to be subject to Principalities and Powers, and to obey Magistrates.* To the Romans, he writes, *Let every Soul be subject unto the higher Powers ; for there is no Power but*

but of God ; the Powers that be, are ordained of God ; whosoever therefore resisteth the Power, resisteth the Ordinance of God ; and they that resist shall receive to themselves Damnation. St Peter likewise gives this general commandment ; Submit yourselves to every Ordinance of Man for the Lord's sake ; whether it be to the King as supreme, or unto Governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well ; for so is the will of God, that ye put to silence the ignorance of foolish men ; as free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

It appears therefore that the Liberty of the Gospel furnishes no pretext for confounding and levelling the orders of Men, or releasing them from the restraints of Law : on the contrary, the Rights of superiors, Respect and Submission to Government is pressed by our Lord and his Apostles in the clearest and most cogent manner. God, as St Paul says, on another occasion, *is not the author of Confusion, but of Peace ;* and accordingly, in his gracious goodness to Mankind, has both declared the

Authority of Governments to proceed from himself and to be ordained of him, and has required Obedience to them, as Service to Himself, denouncing condemnation against the Disobedient. Submission therefore and Obedience to Government rest on the surest foundation, the Authority and express commands of God. But its necessity is further to be supported and maintained from the general nature and design of Government, and more particularly with respect to ourselves, from the excellence of our own Constitution.

The bare mention that the great end of Government is the preservation of* property, comprehending under that term the lives, Liberties, and Estates of men, is in a manner sufficient to shew that the happiness of mankind depends on the support of its authority; that the peace and quiet and security of society and of individuals, are in proportion to its strength or weakness, its vigour or relaxation. And from thence the inference is clear, that for the sake of this great and beneficial purpose, for the preservation and
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* V. Locke on Civil Government, C. 9. § 123.

advancement both of public and private felicity, Obedience to Government is necessary, inasmuch as whatever impedes its strength and vigour, obstructs likewise the general and particular Happiness of Man. For men have either voluntarily given up, or been compelled to submit their Natural Rights,* of judging of Themselves, and of redressing and punishing injuries to themselves by their own power; and have renounced the uncontroled enjoyment of all the Privileges of the Law of Nature, that the common and known arbitration of the Laws, and the collected Power of Society might afford that Protection and Security, might maintain that Order and public Tranquility, and establish that private enjoyment of Property, which is essential to Happiness, and which, on no other footing, can possibly be supported in the world.

Such are the principles, upon which Obedience to Government is founded: and, if any increase of obligation to this duty arises from the nature of any particular Government, This Nation, above all others, is bounden

* V. Locke on Civil Gov. c. 7. § 87.

den by the strongest ties to quiet and grateful Submission to the Laws, from the peculiar and transcendent excellency of its Constitution : which, beyond all comparison, is framed in the wisest and most perfect system for the maintenance and advancement of every beneficial purpose of political Society. In the general view, we find in it the advantages of every species of Government united. The Patriotism and Public Spirit of the People, the Wisdom and Abilities of the Nobles, the Vigour and Strength of Monarchy are here most happily combined ; by their mutual and absolute check upon each other, restraining the Folly and Madness of the People, the Insolence and Oppression of the Great, and the Tyranny of Regal Despotism : and have so blended in the Constitution the zeal of public Virtue and Liberty, the prudence and sagacity of Counsel, the activity and strength of Power, that they go hand in hand together, and effectually cooperate to the Happiness and Stability of the Whole. A system of Government excellent beyond all other ; not short-lived and visionary, as in the times of Imperial Tyranny had been imagined ; but

* V. Tacitus Annal. 4. § 33.

such, as in this Country for ages has been realized to the singular glory and happiness of this Nation, and has maintained inviolate the Lives, and Liberties, and Fortunes of its Subjects; producing such public and private securities for their Preservation, as no other Country can boast! With regard to the Public, besides the general and natural tendency of such a combination, and mutual check of the several Powers of the State; the rights and liberties of the people are expressly declared and specified; and in case of any public Grievance in our Laws, or Violation of them, application is permitted to either of the branches of the Legislature, under such wise and prudent regulations, as at the same time to prevent all factious and licentious tumult, and to arm it with sufficient energy and power. If we consider the more private securities of the Subject; its Courts of Law are ever open for the Support of Rights, and the Redress of Injuries: with Them, the Preservation of private Property, the Lives, and Liberties, and Estates of individuals, is entrusted; No Offenders are too great for Punishment, no Subject too inconsiderable for the Redress

Redress of Justice. I need not mention the well-known powers of the Habeas Corpus, the Trial by Jury, the constant Administration of Justice in the preservation of the Peace, by Magistrates in their several Counties, at Home and in their public Sessions ; and its solemn dispensations by the venerable Sages of the Law throughout the whole Kingdom, in their several circuits : but, the Separation and distinction of the Judicial Power from the Legislative and Executive, is more particularly to be regarded, together with the noble independence of the Judges, the Guardians and Oracles of our Laws ; who now, by the great Blessing of the Revolution, and the Wisdom and Goodness of our present most gracious Sovereign, are irremovable from their station, but by their own corrupt and illegal dispensation of Justice ; and are secure in the full and certain enjoyment of such appointments, as are suitable to the dignity and importance of their station, and to the support of their Independence and Incorruption : Wise and admirable provisions, essential to the impartiality of Justice, and the strongest preservatives of the Rights and Liberties of the Subject !

From this short review, the singular Excellence of our Constitution may appear ; and together with the preceding reflections, teach us, how strictly we are bounden in Reason, in Gratitude and Conscience, to a steady and uniform Obedience to its Laws ; a duty essential also to its Preservation, and to the continuance of that Protection, that Security, that Felicity, which is the end and purpose of all Government, and which we peculiarly enjoy under our Own, and is secured to Us in the most eminent degree.

The foregoing reflections have long since been addressed to you from this place on a more appropriate occasion ; the great and solemn Administration of public Justice in this County. In the present times ; when, under the pretences of a better Equalization, and Support of the natural Rights of Man, a restless and turbulent Spirit of Innovation has gone forth into the world, and the delusive and specious Phantom is everywhere extending its baleful and destructive Influence ; it may not be deemed, I flatter myself, improper, to have recalled to your attention these

most important Considerations, the End and Sanctions of Government, and the Duties and Grounds of Reverence and Submission to its Authority : and to have presented again this sketch of the frame and constitution of our Own, in order that in some degree we might know, even from this imperfect view, and feel its excellence, not only in its public strength and energy, but in its peculiar provision for the happiness of its Subjects, and the Enjoyment by every Individual, in peace and security, of all, that rational Liberty can desire.—O Liberty ! thou sacred and much-injured name ! How often under thy cover has *maliciousness been cloked* ? Assuming thy form, how frequently has lawless Oppression trampled on the dearest Rights of Man ; outrageous Licentiousness and domineering Tyranny usurped thy throne, even now fresh reeking with massacre, with innocent and Royal Blood ;* and under pretensions to thy sanction, spreading abroad, with imperious Despotism, the Desolations of War, the Miseries of Confusion and Anarchy ; and hurling Defiance at the World ? Turn from us, O God, the fury of the Storm ! Calm its Rage, and restore

Louis XVI. K of France, beh. at Paris Jan. 21, 1793.

to the labouring World, Tranquility, Peace, and Order! Without the controuling coercion of Law, no true, no Liberty worthy the concern of Man, can possibly exist. In that frame of Government, with which the gracious Favour of the Almighty has blessed these Kingdoms, the known authority and powers of Law are ever in exertion for the support and maintenance of all that is dear to Man, in the safeguard and protection of his Life, his Liberty and Property, against every usurpation of violence and oppression. Happy, Supremely happy must we be, if we duly feel and prize, and cherish this inestimable Gift of God!

Let us therefore, my Brethren, in full conviction of our duty towards God, to our Country, and to ourselves, if we regard the Sanctions, which God has given to Government, the welfare and prosperity of our Country, and our own particular and dearest Interests, chearfully and conscientiously cooperate with the exertions of Government in their support; by ready Submission and Obedience to the Laws, in brotherly Affection one to another, Honour to the King and those in

Authority under him, and in the humble Fear of the Great and Glorious God, by whom, for the benefit of Mankind, the Powers of Government have been ordained, and who is not the Author of Confusion, but the God of Peace. And with due Reverence and grateful Hearts let us return Thanks unto Him, for his gracious Preservation of our Laws, and Liberties, and Religion; and forsaking our Sins, and turning unto the Lord our God in sincerity and truth with all our Hearts, let us implore His Mercy upon us, and the continual Protection of His Providence, Peace and Prosperity upon Israel Now and for Evermore.

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